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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5254  
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6702  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5591  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 2143  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0388  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1318  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3860  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0773  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2225  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 1022  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0329  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0823  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001909

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2031  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SCUL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ TO "REVIEW" PRIVATE TV AND RADIO LICENSES

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Classified By: Mark Wells, A/Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(b).

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) President Chavez threatened on June 14 to review private television and radio licenses. Senior chavistas affirmed the President's call, claiming that private channels often violate the Venezuelan media law and even promote pornography. A prominent private television channel president told us Chavez's announcement amounts to an all-out assault on the freedom of press. Although two targeted TV stations have, in fact, valid concessions for many more years, the BRV said the licenses may be revoked at any time. While Chavez often makes good on such threats in the fullness of time, this one may be more about keeping the opposition outraged and off balance. END SUMMARY

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GUN-TOTING CHAVEZ THREATENS PRIVATE MEDIA  
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¶2. (SBU) At a ceremony marking the arrival of Russian AK-103 rifles at the Ministry of Defense on June 14, President Chavez slipped into his speech his determination that BRV authorities review all private television and radio licenses. Too many channels, said Chavez, are hiding behind freedom of expression to divide the Venezuelan people. Chavez also said the anti-BRV media is financed by the USG. Chavez asserted that this measure would protect the people and national unity from a private media-led psychological war aimed at dividing the nation. If his message was not clear enough, Chavez then brandished one of the newly acquired rifles and aimed it a cameraman from the opposition Globovision network, who was visibly shaken.

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CHAVISTAS GIVE UNBRIDLED SUPPORT  
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¶3. (U) After Chavez's speech, Minister of Communication Willian Lara gave an immediate press conference to elaborate on Chavez's announcement, couching it in terms of constitutional legality. Lara invoked the terms of the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television (RESORTE) as the guiding principle behind the President's pronouncement. He carefully stated that if private television or radio stations are found to not be complying with the RESORTE law or other regulations, then indeed there would be valid reason not to renew their licenses. Lara mentioned that Chavez was referring to the possibility of not renewing licenses based on findings of an Information and Communications Ministry study. Lara later added that the BRV need not wait for the licenses to expire to rescind them based on legal violations.

¶4. (U) National Assembly President Nicolas Maduro also lauded Chavez's initiative, calling television programming "pornography" which permeates throughout society, "just like in the United States." Maduro called for debate on the subject of a new communication paradigm in Venezuela, one that does not require the country to become entirely prudish but one that uses the power of the media to "stimulate values of co-existence, love, and society."

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THE OPPOSITION REACTS  
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¶5. (U) Presidential candidate Teodoro Petkoff lamented that Chavez views a free press as a "rock in his shoe." Another candidate, William Ojeda, cited Chavez's announcement as

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further proof that this government is "incapable of being democratic." Minor presidential candidate Roberto Smith said Chavez's action revealed the "cowardice of a president who wants to be re-elected," to the point of menacing all possible critics. Secretary General of opposition party COPEI, Luis Ignacio Plana, labeled it a "vile attack" that will have the greatest impact on the poor by removing their primary method of airing their complaints.

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WHOM DOES THIS AFFECT?  
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¶6. (C) Charge and PAO met with RCTV president Marcel Granier June 17. Granier characterized Chavez's statement as a full frontal assault on freedom of expression. He indicated, however, that Chavez often takes his time in following up his rhetoric with action. This is not to say his threats are empty, he said, because their effect is to leave the targets in a stage of uncertainty. Granier said Chavez is likely to string this threat out as long as possible.

¶7. (SBU) During his speech, Chavez implied some significant opposition media licenses would expire in 2007. RCTV and Globovision, the two highest-profile anti-Chavez television stations, point out they are licensed through 2020 and 2015, respectively. Minister Lara's clarification on June 20 suggested the BRV could at any time use the telecommunications regulator, CONATEL, and its Social Responsibility Directorate, to shutter any station.

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COMMENT  
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¶8. (C) We have little doubt Chavez would one day like to silence all news outlets that criticize him. The scene and

timing for the announcement, however, makes us wonder if this is not some Chavez formulaic shock talk to distract attention from other serious problems like corruption scandals, skyrocketing crime, or expensive overseas adventurism. Regardless, Chavez's remarks are yet another compelling proof of Chavez's animosity toward the free press and growing authoritarianism.

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